

A critical appraisal of "The Shack" by William P. Young (Los Angeles: Windblown Media 2007, April 10th printing).

- 1. "The Shack" is great.**
- 2. "The Shack" has grown out of life.**
- 3. "The Shack" has its limitations.**
 - a. The Antiauthoritarian Tendency of "The Shack"
 - b. The Universalistic Tendency of "The Shack"
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1. "The Shack" is great.

"The Shack" is a surprise bestseller in the USA. It is a piece of Christian Fiction about God and pain, the injustice in this world, about the Trinity, forgiveness, inner healing, about God's love and determination to redeem those who are totally lost. A central concept of the book is "relationship", "relationship and love". All the other topics are developed and unfold under that ruling perspective.

The book cover gives this fitting summary:

"Mackenzie Allen Philips' youngest daughter, Missy, has been abducted during a family vacation and evidence that she may have been brutally murdered is found in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later in the midst of his Great Sadness, Mack receives a suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him back to that shack for a weekend. Against his better judgment he arrives at the shack on a wintry afternoon and walks back into his darkest nightmare. What he finds there will change Mack's world forever. In a world where religion seems to grow increasingly irrelevant 'The Shack' wrestles with the timeless question, 'Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain?' The answers Mack gets will astound you and perhaps transform you as much as it did him. You'll want everyone you know to read this book!"

It is a fascinating book, and it is a great read. Astonishingly, the author tells us in an interview by "Brother Maynard", that they were a kind of compelled to publish the book themselves, because publishing houses would not accept it: "The decision was made for us...nobody would give us the time of day. Religious publishers said they liked it, but it was too edgy. Secular publishers told us they like it personally, but there was too much 'Jesus' in it. So Wayne and Brad created a publishing company and did it ourselves. It is all about our relationships with each other. There are no contracts, no letters of intent, no signed anything."¹

2. "The Shack" has grown out of life.

We learn from the same interview that the book was originally intended to be a gift of the father to his six children: "Remember, I wrote this story for my children (not to be published), so I took some liberties I might not have otherwise."

Like Mack, the main human character in the book, William P. Young went through a time of great sadness. The book cover tells us: "William P. Young was born a Canadian and raised among a stone-age tribe by his missionary parents in the highlands of what was New Guinea. He suffered great loss as a child and young adult, and now enjoys the 'wastefulness of grace' with his family in the Pacific Northwest."

Asked by Brother Maynard, why he has chosen the plot of his book to be based on the traumatic experience of Mack losing his beloved daughter Missy William P. Young tells us: "We went through a six month period where my 18 year old brother was killed, my mother-in-law suddenly died of a massive coronary at age 59, and my 5 year old niece was killed the day after her 5th birthday. Having 4

¹ See www.subversiveinfluence.com, Blog Interview: William P. (Paul) Young, Author of *The Shack*, by Brother Maynard on September 28, 2007.

boys and 2 girls myself, this is a situation that moves to the heart of theodicy as an issue. It is not about politics and cannot be easily put aside - it is about pain and suffering and injustice. I didn't choose it for graphic reasons (as it is not very graphic at all), but because it captures our focus."

3. "The Shack" has its limitations.

This book has been praised by many. One of the positive reviews you can find again on www.subversiveinfluence.com : The Shack: A Spoiler-Free Review by Brother Maynard (September 27, 2007).

What I want to do here is not to give just another review full of praise, but to point out some concerns, some tendencies. I think much of it is related to the fact that this is a book of fiction, written first for the own children within the small family circle. It is not supposed to be a book of Systematic Theology. But on the other hand you clearly can tell that the author knows something about Theology. And he spells out many deep insights. And it is a book full of God, full of God's conversations with Mack (the three persons of the Trinity talk to and have fellowship with Mack from page 82 to 236, this is 156 pages of 248).

Again I want to say, the book is fascinating, gripping, a great read, and who will not have sympathy with Mack or Mackenzie, who goes through enormous pain and is wonderfully healed by "Papa" God, the "Free Spirit" and "Jesus". Who does not rejoice, when he let's his great sadness go, matures to forgive and rejoices in his own forgiveness, enjoying unconditional love. Who does not feel that he encounters biblical truths and insights during these 156 pages.

But the book at the same time is a kind of cartoon, driving home its main points by exaggeration and an overemphasis. I have not met children who have read this book. I have encountered adults, committed Christians who have been touched by its message. Many will find this book liberating and will tell you so. I think the liberating effect and the touching element is linked to the "cartoon character" of the book, the one sidedness in certain areas. Or to put it in another way: The strength of the book is its being unbalanced. It has such an enormous impact because it displays only a part of the biblical truths about God's love and the ways of the holy Trinity.

The book is not only full of God, it is also full of Theology and full of world view or ideology. The question the reader has to ask himself is whether he wants to let himself be freed by this fascinating novel from "traditional views" he owned before. Is he willing to entrust himself to the flow of the story, to the arguments of "God"? I see certain tendencies which prevent me from doing this:

- a. The Antiauthoritarian Tendency of "The Shack"
- b. The Universalistic Tendency of "The Shack"
- c. The Feministic Tendency of "The Shack"
- d. The Antinomistic Tendency of "The Shack"
- e. The "Redefining Tendency" of "The Shack"

a. The Antiauthoritarian Tendency of "The Shack"

The central message of the book is about relationship. Living in relationships is the ultimate goal, the ultimate virtue. Mack meets the Trinity of Papa, Sarayu (the free spirit or wind) and a Jesus in Jeans to learn relationship from them and get changed. Their relationship is non-hierarchical and resembles a kind of antiauthoritarian, communistic base cell. Here comes a longer quote to illustrate this and give an impression of the self-revelatory style of the Shack-Trinity (p. 121-123):

"Well, I know that you are one and all, and that there are three of you. But you respond with such graciousness to each other. Isn't one of you more the boss than the other two?"

The three looked at one another as if they had never thought of such a question.

'I mean,' Mack hurried on, 'I have always thought of God the Father as sort of being the boss and Jesus as the one following orders, you know, being obedient. I'm not sure how the Holy Spirit fits in exactly. He ... I mean, she ... uh...' Mack tried not to look at Sarayu as he

stumbled for words. '... Whatever - the Spirit always seemed kind of a ... uh ...'

'A free Spirit?' offered Papa.

'Exactly - a free Spirit, but still under the direction of the Father. Does that make sense?'

Jesus looked over at Papa, obviously trying with some difficulty to maintain the perception of a very serious exterior. 'Does that make sense to you, Abba? Frankly, I haven't a clue what this man is talking about.'

Papa scrunched her face up as if exerting great concentration. 'Nope, I have been trying to make head or tail out of it, but sorry, he's got me lost.'

'You know what I am talking about.' Mack was a little frustrated. 'I am talking about who's in charge. Don't you have a chain of command?'

'Chain of command? That sounds ghastly!' Jesus said.

'At least binding,' Papa added as they both started laughing, and then Papa turned to Mack and sang, 'Though chains be of gold, they are chains all the same.'

'Now don't concern yourself with those two,' Sarayu interrupted, reaching her hand to comfort and calm him. 'They are just playing with you. This is actually a subject of interest among us.'

Mack nodded, relieved and a little chagrined that he had again allowed himself to lose his composure.

'Mackenzie, we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a *circle* of relationship, not a chain of command or 'great chain of being' as your ancestors termed it. What you're seeing here is relationship without any over-lay of power. We don't need power over the other because we are always looking out for the best. Hierarchy would make no sense among us. Actually, this is your problem, not ours.'

'Really? How so?'

'Humans are so lost and damaged that to you it is almost incomprehensible that people could work or live together without someone being in charge.'

'But every human institution that I can think of, from political to business, even down to marriage, is governed by this kind of thinking; it is the web of our social fabric,' Mack asserted.

'Such a waste!' said Papa, picking up the empty dish and heading for the kitchen.

'It's one reason why experiencing true relationship is so difficult for you,' Jesus added. 'Once you have a hierarchy you need rules to protect and administer it, and then you need law and the enforcement of the rules, and you end up with some kind of chain of command or a system of order that destroys relationship rather than promotes it. You rarely see or experience relationship apart from power. Hierarchy imposes laws and rules and you end up missing the wonder of relationship that we intended for you.'

'Well,' said Mack sarcastically, sitting back in his chair. 'We sure seem to have adapted pretty well to it.'

Sarayu was quick to reply: 'Don't confuse adaptation for intention, or seduction for reality.' "

The lesson from withing the Shack-Trinity is: Power or authority of one over the other seems to be evil, prohibiting true relationship. If mankind lives in an other way, this is seduction and evil. Hierarchy among humans is a "waste". In the ongoing conversation "Papa" states that the "will to power and independence" is "the matrix; a diabolical scheme in which you are hopelessly trapped even while completely unaware of its existence". The "matrix" is where one human has authority over the other (p. 124).

Because all power of one over the other is evil, the Jesus of the Shack tells Mack (p. 145-146) more about "submission" without authority and obedience within the Trinity and towards even mankind:

"That's the beauty you see in my relationship with Abba and Sarayu. We are indeed submitted to one another and have always been so and always will be. Papa is as much submitted to me as I to him, or Sarayu to me, or Papa to her. Submission is not about authority and it is not obedience; it is all about relationships of love and respect. In fact, we are submitted to you in the same way.'

Mack was surprised. 'How can that be? Why would the God of the universe want to be submitted to me?'

'Because we want you to join us in our circle of relationship. I don't want slaves to my will; I want brothers and sisters who will share life with me.'

'And that's how you want us to love each other, I suppose? I mean between husbands and wives, parents and children. I guess in any relationship?'

'Exactly! When I am your life, submission is the most natural expression of my character and nature, and it will be the most natural expression of your new nature within relationships.' "

Because there is this authority-free and power-free relationship within the Shack-Trinity and because the Shack-Trinity wants the same power-free relationship with all mankind including Mack, Papa and Sarayu and Jesus behave and speak the way they do.

From the start "Papa" makes it clear that Mack is free to go whenever he wills, because Papa "is not interested in prisoners" (p. 94). All 156 pages long Mack breathes freedom in the fellowship with the Trinity, without fear, without pressure and a lot of fun. Some of the main verbs used for the Shack-Trinity are laughing, grinning, smiling, chuckling, hugging, like in the following incident (p. 104):

"It appeared that Jesus had dropped a large bowl of some sort of batter or sauce on the floor, and it was everywhere. It must have landed close to Papa because the lower portion of her skirt and bare feet were covered in the gooey mess. All three were laughing so hard that Mack didn't think they were breathing. Sarayu said something about humans being clumsy and all three started roaring again."

b. The Universalistic Tendency of "The Shack"

To be together with such a Trinity is just fun. There is no need to fear anything. For Mack the time in the Shack is a kind of camping holiday with the triune God, a nice God, a human God, a hugging, being fond of Mack God, a redeeming God. It is camping holiday and therapy in one. God is a kind friend and trained psychotherapist, perhaps having learned from Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers, when you see his non-pressuring, non-directive, non-rule approach to therapy, giving Mack all the freedom he needs and the time, giving no commandments, but conversing the truth into him, or out of him?

Of course, this Fun God is fond of all people (p. 118-120):

" 'You seem to be especially fond of a lot of people,' Mack observed with a suspicious look. 'Are there any who you are *not* especially fond of?'

She lifted her head and rolled her eyes as if she were mentally going through the catalog of every being ever created. 'Nope, I haven't been able to find any. Gues that's jes' the way I is.'

Mack was interested. 'Do you ever get mad at any of them?'

'Sho 'nuff! What parent doesn't? There is a lot to be mad about in the mess my my kids have made and in the mess they're in. I don't like a lot of choices they make, but that anger – especially for me – is an expression of love all the same. I love the ones I am angry with just as much as those I'm not.'

'But,' Mack paused. 'What about your wrath? It seems to me that if you're going to pretend to be God Almighty, you need to be a lot angrier.'

'Do I now?'

'That's what I'd think. Weren't you always running around killing people in the Bible? You just don't seem to fit the bill.'

'I understand how disorienting all this must be for you, Mack. But the only one pretending here is you. I am what I am. I'm not trying to fit anyone's bill.'
...'But if you are God, aren't you the one spilling out great bowls of wrath and throwing people into a burning lake of fire? ... Honestly, don't you enjoy punishing those who disappoint you?'

At that, Papa stopped her preparations and turned toward Mack. He could see a deep sadness in her eyes. "I am not who you think I am, Mackenzie. I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my joy to cure it."

In this conversation even God's anger is an expression of love. All are seen to be God's children, independent of the question whether they are born again or have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal savior (John 1:12). Mack's question after hell and God's wrath meets only "Papa's" sadness. Papa is determined to cure all children. Mack's question for God killing people in the Bible ('That's what I'd think. Weren't you always running around killing people in the Bible? You just don't seem to fit the bill.') is not answered with the Bible. The word "bill" is used later by Mack in his question and by "Papa" in her answer. Papa is not Bible-oriented and not bill-oriented, he is free like Sarayu. There is no absolute norm Papa himself has given or is bound to. Papa is who he or she is. And as we learn from page 223:

"Papa spoke gently and reassuringly. 'Son, this is not about shaming you. I don't do humiliation, or guilt, or condemnation. They don't produce one speck of wholeness or righteousness, and that is why they were nailed into Jesus on the cross.'"

Because God is fond of all people, he has people everywhere (p. 182):

"'Is that what it means to be a Christian?' It sounded kind of stupid as Mack said it, but it was how he was trying to sum everything up in his mind.

'Who said anything about being a Christian? I'm not a Christian.'

The idea struck Mack as odd and unexpected and he couldn't keep himself from grinning. 'No, I suppose you aren't.'

They arrived at the door of the workshop. Again Jesus stopped. 'Those who love me come from every system that exists. They were Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans and many who don't vote or are not part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions. I have followers who were murderers and many who were self-righteous. Some are bankers and bookies, Americans and Iraqis, Jews and Palestinians. I have no desire to make them Christian, but I do want to join them in their transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa, into my brothers and sisters, into my Beloved.'

'Does that mean,' asked Mack, 'that all roads will lead to you?'

'Not at all,' smiled Jesus as he reached for the door handle to the shop. 'Most roads don't lead anywhere. What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you.'"

The Jesus of the Shack-Trinity is not "a Christian" and he is not interested in making people from other ideologies or religions Christian. He is free to walk into any system and transform individuals in a kind of undercover redeeming work. There are no boundaries for this Jesus. He has a universal access to all mankind free from any religious hindrances.

c. The Feministic Tendency of "The Shack"

"Papa" God revealed herself to Mack when he entered the Shack in the following way (p. 82-83):

"Mack decided to bang loudly and see what happened, but just as he raised his fist to do so, the door flew open, and he was looking directly into the face of a large beaming African-American woman. Instinctively he jumped back, but he was too slow. With speed that belied her size, she crossed the distance between them and engulfed him in her arms, lifting him clear off his feet and spinning him around like a little child. And all the while she was shouting his name - "Mackenzie Allen Philips" - with the ardor of someone seeing a long-lost and deeply-loved

relative. She finally put him back on earth and, with her hands on his shoulders, pushed him back as if to get a good look at him.

'Mack. look at you!' she fairly exploded. 'Here you are, and so grown up. I have really been looking forward to seeing you face to face. It is so wonderful to have you here with us. My, my, my how I do love you!' And with that she wrapped herself around him again. Mack was speechless."

Later "Papa" explains why she choose to appear to Mack as female (p. 93):

"She picked up the wooden spoon again, dripping with some sort of batter. 'Mackenzie, I am neither male nor female, even though both genders are derived from my nature. If I choose to *appear* to you as a man or a woman, it's because I love you. For me to appear to you as a woman and suggest that you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors, to help you keep from falling so easily back into your religious conditioning.'"

The Jesus of the Shack is against roles (p. 148):

"Power in the hands of independent humans, be they men or women, does corrupt. Mack, don't you see how filling roles is the opposite of relationship? We want male and female to be counterparts, face-to-face equals, each unique and different, distinctive in gender but complementary, and each empowered uniquely by Sarayu from whom all true power and authority originates."

We already have seen the idea of submission without obedience within the Trinity and within the family, husband and wife, parents and children included (p. 145-146):

"That's the beauty you see in my relationship with Abba and Sarayu. We are indeed submitted to one another and have always been so and always will be. Papa is as much submitted to me as I to him, or Sarayu to me, or Papa to her. Submission is not about authority and it is not obedience; it is all about relationships of love and respect. In fact, we are submitted to you in the same way.'

Mack was surprised. 'How can that be? Why would the God of the universe want to be submitted to me?'

'Because we want you to join us in our circle of relationship. I don't want slaves to my will; I want brothers and sisters who will share life with me.'

'And that's how you want us to love each other, I suppose? I mean between husbands and wives, parents and children. I guess in any relationship?'

'Exactly! When I am your life, submission is the most natural expression of my character and nature, and it will be the most natural expression of your new nature within relationships.' "

The Feministic Tendency of "The Shack" is as much an outflow and consequence of the Antiauthoritarian Tendency of "The Shack" as is its antinomistic Tendency.

d. The Antinomistic Tendency of "The Shack"

The Greek word for law in the New Testament is "nomos". Antinomism is a teaching against God's good law. It is denying the law the status it should have according to God's will and covenant. The law and commandments of the Old Testament are a wonderful gift of God (see for example Psalm 119), they are reinforced by Jesus Christ in the New Testament (Matthew 5:17-20). Jesus could say: "You are my friends, if you do what I command you" (John 15:14). In other words: The Jesus of the Bible surely wants to have a relationship of love and friendship with his disciples, but he is not against rules or commandments as the Jesus of the Shack is. Quite to the contrary: "Who follows my commandments, is the one, who loves me" (John 14:21). Some credit the Apostle Paul with Antinomism, but this would be a misreading of his teaching, because he loved the law of God (Rom 7:12.14.22) and he often used it in an evangelical way to teach the believers what love is (Rom 13:8-10; Eph 6:1-3).

But if there is no rule and power of the Trinity over mankind, but God lives in submission to Mack and

the rest of mankind, then he is not a God who commands and thus exerts power. Because power is evil. It hinders relationships. In consequence to the idea that the Godhead is antiauthoritarian by necessity you have antinomism. The commandments and the nomos must be redefined to be mere promises. You have this in the Shack in the following sections (first the quote we already had from p. 122):

'It's one reason why experiencing true relationship is so difficult for you,' Jesus added. 'Once you have a hierarchy you need rules to protect and administer it, and then you need law and the enforcement of the rules, and you end up with some kind of chain of command or a system of order that destroys relationship rather than promotes it. You rarely see or experience relationship apart from power. Hierarchy imposes laws and rules and you end up missing the wonder of relationship that we intended for you.'

On page 197-198 "Papa" explains to Mack:

" 'The Bible doesn't teach you to follow rules. It is a picture of Jesus. While words may tell you what God is like and even what he may want from you, you cannot do any of it on your own. Life and living is *in him* and in no other. My goodness, you didn't think you could live the righteousness of God on your own, did you?'

'Well, I thought so, sorta ...' he said sheepishly. 'But you gotta admit, rules and principles are simpler than relationships.'

'It is true that relationships are a whole lot messier than rules, but rules will never give you answers to the deep questions of the heart and they will never love you.'

Having enjoyed the fellowship with the Trinity in the Shack Mack asks (P. 198):

" ' So, will I see you again?'

'Of course. You might see me in a piece of art, or music, or silence, or through people, or in Creation, or in your joy and sorrow. My ability to communicate is limitless, living and transforming, and it will always be tuned to Papa's goodness and love. And you will hear and see me in the Bible in fresh ways. Just don't look for rules and principles; look for relationship - a way of coming to be with us.'

About the 10 commandments we are told on p. 202-203:

" 'Then why did you give us those commandments?' asked Mack.

'Actually, we wanted you to give up trying to be righteous on your own. It was a mirror to reveal just how filthy your face gets when you live independently... But can you clean your face with the same mirror that shows you how dirty you are? There is no mercy or grace in rules, not even for one mistake. That's why Jesus fulfilled all of it for you - so that it no longer has jurisdiction over you. And the Law that once contained impossible demands - Thou Shall Not... - actually becomes a promise we fulfill in you...But keep in mind that if you live your life alone and independently, the promise is empty. Jesus laid the demand of the law to rest; it no longer has any power to accuse or command. Jesus is both the promise and its fulfillment.'

'Are you saying I don't have to follow the rules?' Mack had now completely stopped eating and was concentrating on the conversation.

'Yes. In Jesus you are not under the law. All things are lawful... Trying to keep the law is actually a declaration of independence, a way of keeping control.'

The only use of the law that is acknowledged here is to recognize sin on the one hand and as a promise that God is going to fulfill it in us (not we) on the other hand. There is no ruling part of the law or commandments over us, there are no rules, they would be detrimental. We should not look in the Bible for rules. All is relationship. This brings us to the Redefining Tendency.

e. The "Redefining Tendency" of "The Shack".

There are dozens of words being redefined in "The Shack", all during the long conversations with Mack. Let's take one key concept of the book as an example: "relationship", or "relationship and love".

In the Holy Scriptures you have relationships and teaching about relationships: The relationship between God and Israel (Exodus 19:1-24:11), husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7), parents and children (Ephesians 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21), slaves and masters (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22), rulers and subjects (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:17).

We have seen that the Jesus of the Shack is against roles in married life (p. 148, emphasis mine):

"Power in the hands of independent humans, be they men or women, does corrupt.

Mack, don't you see how filling roles is the opposite of relationship? We want male and female to be counterparts, face-to-face equals, each unique and different, distinctive in gender but complementary, and each empowered uniquely by Sarayu from whom all true power and authority originates."

The relationship between husband and wife has to be without role of wife and husband. In the above given texts of the Holy Bible it is possible for the husband to love his wife even when the wife is submitted to him in obedience. The same would be true for parents: they can love their children, even when they educate and train them and rule over them with parental authority. In the Bible you can and you should fulfill your role within the authority structure ordered by God, like children obeying their parents (Col 3:20), but the Shack-Trinity teaches us, that there will be no real relationship between parents and children, if there is such an authority structure.

The same is true for the vital relationship of God with Israel or the Church with Christ. In the Bible there are rules and commandments, in the Old Testament and in the New (Matthew 7:12-27). If we hear what Christ commands us and do it through his grace, then we are wise house builders who build their life on the rock. If we do not do it, our life will crush like a house built on sand and we go to the lake of fire and burn in hell (Matthew 7:27; 5:27-30). But the Shack-Trinity invites us, not to look for rules and principles in the Bible, but for "relationship" with God and our neighbor.

In the Bible there is no contradiction between the redemption in Jesus and after having been redeemed following God's rules inspired by his grace and love. Quite to the contrary we are commanded to do this (1 John 3:1-4; 5:1-4).

The word relationship in the Shack is an empty nut without filling. Every reader will read into it, what he thinks is best. "Relationship and love": How do you know what love is, when you do not follow the revelation of God. Is love to steal or not to steal, to kill or not to kill? Is it to be faithful to your partner or be unfaithful?

There are other words being redefined in the Shack: God's anger and wrath, his children, his holiness and so on and so forth. The most important one besides the word "relationship" is the redefined concept of the Trinity. The Shack-Trinity is not the Trinity of the Holy Bible, it is more modern. It is interesting that the Shack-Trinity is fond of so much, but definitely against certain things, for example against institutions (p. 179):

" 'You're not too fond of religion and institutions?' Mack said...

'I don't create institutions - never have, never will.'

'What about the institution of marriage?'

'Marriage is not an institution. It's a relationship.' Jesus paused, his voice steady and patient.

'Like I said, I don't create institutions; that's an occupation for those who want to play God.

So no, I'm not too big on religion,' Jesus said a little sarcastically, 'and not very fond of politics or economics either.' Jesus' visage darkened noticeably. 'And why should I be? They are the man-created trinity of terrors that ravages the earth and deceives those I care about. What mental turmoil and anxiety does any human face that is not related to one of those three?'"

The bottom line is: "The Shack" is a great book, it came from the life of the author. You can enjoy reading it very much, but you must know what you do when you follow the arguments of the Shack-Trinity. If you like the tendencies, go with it. If you cling to more "traditional" views then keep on cross checking with the Holy Scriptures.

Eddy Lanz, July 2008